

Heart Disease and Women: Preventing and Controlling High Blood Pressure

CORONARY HEART DISEASE is a woman's concern. Every woman's concern. One in ten American women 45 to 64 years of age has some form of heart disease, and this increases to one in five women over 65. Another 1.6 million women have had a stroke. Both heart disease and stroke are known as cardiovascular diseases, which are serious disorders of the heart and blood vessel system.

High blood pressure, also known as hypertension, greatly increases your chances of developing cardiovascular diseases, and it is the most important risk factor for stroke. Even slightly high levels double your risk. More than half of American women will develop high blood pressure at some point in their lives.

High blood pressure is sometimes called the "silent killer" because most people who have it do not feel sick. That makes it particularly important to have your blood pressure checked each time you see your doctor or other health professional. If your blood pressure is found to be at 140/90 or above, then you have high blood pressure. You will likely need to have your pressure measured on at least two more occasions to be sure the result is accurate.

(See page 4.)

WHAT YOU CAN DO: CONTROL AND PREVENTION

If you have high blood pressure, you can control it with proper treatment. If you don't have high blood pressure now, you can take steps to prevent it from developing. You can help to control *and* prevent high blood pressure by taking the following steps:

Limit Your Alcohol Use. If you drink alcohol, have no more than one drink per day.

That means no more than 12 ounces of beer, 5 ounces of wine, or 1 1/2 ounces of hard liquor.

Use Less Salt. Try seasoning foods instead with herbs, spices, and lemon juice. Keep in mind that sodium, an ingredient in salt, is "hidden" in many packaged and processed foods. Check product labels for the amount of sodium in each serving. Many experts advise a total daily salt intake of no more than 6 grams, which equals about 2,400 milligrams of sodium—this includes whatever is added during cooking and at the table. If you would like to try a salt substitute, talk with your doctor first, because they are not safe for everyone.

Be Physically Active. Even low- to moderate-intensity activity, if done regularly, can help control and prevent high blood pressure. Examples of such exercise are walking for pleasure, gardening, yardwork, moderate-to-heavy housework, dancing, and home exercise. Try to do one or more of these activities every day.

Lose Weight If You Are Overweight. Taking off excess pounds will help to control and prevent high blood pressure, and will lower your chances of developing cardiovascular disease in several



Heart Disease Risk Factors

Risk factors are habits or traits that make a person more likely to develop a disease. Many of those for heart disease can be controlled. These include:

- ▲ Cigarette smoking
- ▲ High blood pressure
- ▲ High blood cholesterol
- ▲ Overweight
- ▲ Physical inactivity
- ▲ Diabetes

The more risk factors you have, the greater your risk. So take action—take control!



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Blood Pressure Categories in Adults (18 Years and Older)

Blood pressure is shown as two numbers—the systolic pressure as the heart is beating and the diastolic pressure between heartbeats. Both numbers are important.

Blood Pressure Level in mm Hg		
Category	Systolic	Diastolic
Normal	<130	<85
High Normal	130-139	85-89
Hypertension		
Stage 1	140-159	90-99
Stage 2	160-179	100-109
Stage 3	180-209	110-119
Stage 4	≥210	≥120

From: The Fifth Report of the Joint National Committee on Detection, Evaluation, and Treatment of High Blood Pressure, NIH, NHLBI, 1993.

other ways. Weight loss will help to prevent and control diabetes, and it can also lower blood cholesterol levels. Finally, since being overweight raises the chances of developing heart disease, losing weight can lower your risk.

The following are some suggestions for making weight loss an easier, safer, and more successful process:

Eat For Health. Choose a wide variety of low-calorie, nutritious foods in moderate amounts. Make sure that these foods are low in fat, especially saturated fat. Remember, fat is the greatest source of calories.

If you have a lot of weight to lose, ask your doctor or a nutritionist to help you develop a sensible, well-balanced plan for gradual weight loss.

Keep Milk On the Menu.

Don't cut out dairy products in trying to reduce calories and fat. Dairy products are rich in calcium, a nutrient that is particularly important for women. Instead, choose skim or low fat, lower calorie dairy products.

Get Beyond Dieting. To keep the pounds off, change your basic eating habits rather than simply "go on a diet." Learn to recognize social and emotional situations that trigger overeating and find ways to cope with them that work for you.

Avoid Fads and Diet Pills.

Most fad diets provide poor nutrition and cause a number of side effects. Although fad diets can give quick and dramatic results, the weight returns quickly once you stop dieting. Also avoid diet pills. Most have troublesome side effects and none of them work for long-term weight loss.

Get a Move On. While physical activity alone won't take off many pounds, exercise can help burn calories, tone muscles, and control appetite. It will also help you keep off the weight you lose.

Move It and Lose It

Activities	Calories Burned per Hour*
Sitting Quietly	80
Standing Quietly	95
Light Activity	240
Office work	
Cleaning house	
Playing golf	
Moderate Activity	370
Walking briskly (3.5 mph)	
Gardening	
Bicycling (5.5 mph)	
Dancing	
Strenuous Activity	580
Jogging (9 min. per mile)	
Swimming	
Very Strenuous Activity	740
Running (7 min. per mile)	
Racquetball	
Skiing	

*For a healthy 140-pound woman. If you weigh more than 140 pounds, you will probably burn more calories per hour. If you weigh less, you will probably burn fewer calories per hour.

Source: Dietary Guidelines for Americans, U.S. Department of Agriculture/U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 1990.

Ask For Support. Tell your family and friends about your weight loss plans and let them know how they can help you. You might also want to join a self-help group devoted to weight control. These groups provide support and practical suggestions on nutrition and long-term weight control.

Another Consideration

It is also important to know that if you take birth control pills, your blood pressure is apt to increase slightly. The risk appears to increase with age and with length of use. If you are taking oral contraceptives, you should get your blood pressure checked regularly. If hypertension develops, you should stop using the pill.

Taking Medication

If you have high blood pressure and it stays high even after you make the changes described above, your doctor will probably also prescribe medicine. The amount you take may be gradually reduced, especially if you are successful with the changes you make in your lifestyle. If you feel any uncomfortable side effects from the drug, ask your doctor about lowering the amount you take, or possibly switching to another type of medicine.



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Keep Track of Your Blood Pressure

Normal: Under 140/90 mm Hg

Date	Blood Pressure
_____	_____
_____	_____
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FOR MORE INFORMATION

If you want to know more about keeping your heart healthy, the National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute (NHLBI) has available free fact sheets on the following subjects: preventing high blood cholesterol, quitting smoking, the heart benefits of physical activity, and heart disease risk factors for women.

Contact:

NHLBI Information Center
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